

## John Laird likely to run for state Senate seat

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Former Assemblyman John Laird, a Democrat from the Santa Cruz area, is likely to run for the state Senate seat now held by Abel Maldonado, should Maldonado be elevated to lieutenant governor in February.

Laird, 59, cannot formally announce his intention yet. The Senate position, which is not up for a vote until 2012, is not open and won't be unless Maldonado resigns to take the higher office.

However, Laird told The Tribune on Thursday he is doing everything necessary to prepare.

Laird would likely run against Republican Sam Blakeslee, the Assembly minority leader, who must leave his post after this year because of term limits.

This game of legislative musical chairs takes place routinely, brought about in part by term limits, which allow a state senator to serve only eight years and Assembly members six years.

Laird represented portions of Monterey, Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties, and said he is a good fit for the 15th District, which encompasses much of the Central California coast.

He has a strong environmental record and opposes offshore oil drilling, perhaps the signature environmental issue along the Central Coast.

Laird has also fought for state parks and was a key player in establishing the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, a group that aims to protect the Sierra Nevada. He was a leader in the designation of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

Elected Mayor of Santa Cruz in 1983, he became the nation's first openly gay mayor.

Like many others, Laird says comity among legislators has broken down, making the Legislature “dysfunctional.” He prides himself on having worked with legislators from other parties and insists that it can and must be done.

Laird’s would-be candidacy will become moot if Maldonado does not become lieutenant governor, and Laird believes Maldonado may be hurting his chances of legislative support by waffling on the question of offshore drilling.

Maldonado historically opposed drilling off the Central Coast, but Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who named him lieutenant governor, now supports it.

Maldonado, in a recent interview with The Tribune editorial board, would not say definitively that he will continue to fight drilling. He described himself as “open-minded, reasonable, and always pragmatic.”